

**The Art of Eldering**  
**Instructors: Belvie Rooks and Sandra Bass**

“It's 3:23 in the morning  
and I'm awake  
because my great great grandchildren  
won't let me sleep  
my great great grandchildren  
ask me in dreams  
what did you do while the planet was plundered?  
what did you do when the earth was unraveling?

~ Drew Dellinger ~

The pressures of the pandemic have been difficult and also revelatory. Many of us, and particularly youth, experienced a crisis of community and connection. Currently suicide is the second leading cause of death for young people 10-24 and we must ask ourselves, what does it say about a society when its young people are so disconnected and despairing that they don't want to be here anymore?

We also are living during one of the most generationally diverse periods in human history. Yet our Western fixation on eternal youth has diminished the role and presence of elders who play a vital role in creating and holding space for co-generational community and collaboration.

In this course writer, human rights and social justice advocate, and long time intergenerational collaborator Belvie Rooks along with Sandra Bass, Interim Senior Associate Dean and Executive Director of the UC Berkeley Public Service Center we will explore the transformative possibilities of the practice of eldering: What does it mean to be an elder? What are the unique gifts co-generational collaboration holds and why are these co-generational relationships critical in our current moment? What insights can we gain about eldering and co-generational collaboration from other cultures, young people, and thought leaders? Through readings, conversation, and in class exercises this course will be both an exploration of the concept and practice of eldering and an invitation to embrace its possibilities.

In addition to OLLI students, we'll be welcoming students and staff from the UC Berkeley Public Service Center to join us and share their wisdom and insights throughout the course.

**Session 1 - What is Eldering And Why Are Elders Needed?**

Eldering is not a function of age, but rather of relationships, community, and culture. In our first session we'll talk about what eldering means given our current context and why elders are needed perhaps more than ever through conversation, storytelling, and reflection with Belvie and Sandra

## **Session 2 - The Shoulders We Stand On**

In this session we will hear what eldering looked like for those engaged in the Southern Freedom Struggle (aka the Civil Rights Movement). We'll be joined by [David Dennis Jr.](#) and [David Dennis Sr.](#), authors of "[The Movement Made Us](#)".

The Movement Made Us is equal parts oral history, memoir, and a poignant, dynamic conversation between a father and son about how working within movements, from the Civil Rights Movement to Black Lives Matter, shaped a nation. Through their story we'll explore the pivotal role eldering within movements has played in the emergence of a contemporary generation of youth leaders and organizers.

## **Session 3 - Wisdom Keepers and Time Rebels**

The path of eldering asks us to reimagine Western notions of age, intergenerational wisdom, time, and place. In this session we'll be exploring the concept of eldering from an indigenous perspective. We'll be joined by [Judith Le Blanc](#), an enrolled member of the Caddo Nation of Oklahoma and Executive Director of The Native Organizers Alliance, a national Native training and organizing network which provides Native organizers training based on traditional Indigenous knowledge values and practices.

## **Session 4 The Future We All Create**

For decades Belvie has been committed to healing intergenerational trauma and catalyzing youth leadership through creative, co-generational collaboration. In our closing session, we will focus on the relationship between eldering and social and environmental stewardship.

We'll also be joined by poet, speaker, writer, and teacher [Drew Dellinger](#) who has inspired minds and hearts around the world, performing poetry and keynoting on justice, ecology, cosmology, and compassion. Drawing on an intergenerational conversation that began nearly 30 years ago between Belvie and Drew, this final session will invite us to expand our notions of time, space, our place in the world and the co-creative possibilities of intergenerational collaboration.

## **Suggested readings**

Roman Kryznaric [The Good Ancestor: A Radical Prescription For Long Term Thinking](#)

David Dennis, Jr. and David Dennis, Sr.. [The Movement Made Us](#)

Vincent Harding [Hope and History: Why We Must Share the Story of the Movement](#)

Stephen Jenkinsen, [Come of Age: The Case for Elderhood in Times of Trouble](#)

Marc Friedman [How to Live Forever](#)

Drew Dellinger [Love Letter to the Milky Way](#) and his NYT op/ed on [the interconnected world of Martin Luther King Jr.](#)

Belvie Rooks and Dedan Gills, "Growing a Global Heart: Love and the Healing of Societal Wounds" in [The Power of Love, A Transformed Heart Changes the World](#)

Dedan Gills and Belvie Rooks, [I Give You The Springtime of My Blushing Heart](#)

## Your Instructors:

**Belvie Rooks** is a writer, educator and human rights and social justice advocate whose work weaves the worlds of spirituality, feminism, cosmology and ecology.

As a teenager meeting, and having an opportunity to spend a weekend retreat with a 29 year-old Martin Luther King had a powerfully transformative impact on her young life, her vision for the future and her role in it.

As an educator, Belvie was invited to be part of the founding faculty of the College of Social Justice at the State University of New York (SUNY) Old Westbury. She has served as Visiting Faculty at Naropa University's Graduate Program in Environmental Studies, core faculty at Holy Names University's Sophia Center Program in Culture and Spirituality, and as a lecturer at UC Santa Cruz.

She has served on the boards of several organizations including, Bioneers, the Ella Baker Center for Human Rights, and the Institute for Noetic Sciences (IONS). IONS was founded by Apollo astronaut Edgar Mitchell-the 6th person to walk on the moon; its vision was grounded in oneness and interrelatedness. During her 8 years as an IONS board member she served as creator and host of *ConverZations That Matter*, recorded dialogues with thought leaders from around the globe including Edgar Mitchell, Brian Swimme, Vincent Harding, Van Jones, Barbara Holmes, Julia Butterfly Hill, Michael Lerner and others. Another powerfully transformative process was her years as an anti-apartheid advocate working to free Nelson Mandela from prison and helping support a process leading to majority rule in Southern Africa. In acknowledgment of her efforts she was deeply honored to serve as an election monitor during the transition to majority rule in South Africa and the accompanying invitation to attend Nelson Mandela's inauguration.

Her published works have appeared in many publications and anthologies including, *Sacred Poems and Prayers of Love*; *The Same River Twice: Honoring the Difficult* (edited by Alice Walker); *My Soul is a Witness: African American Women's Spirituality*; *Life Notes: Personal Writings by Black Women*; *Moonrise: The Power of Women Leading from the Heart*; *Ecological and Social Healing: Multicultural Women's Voices*. She is a Before Columbus Foundation American Book Award Winner as senior editor of *Paris Connections: African American Artists in Paris* and Co-Producer, with Danny Glover and Damani Baker, of the award-winning film *The House on Coco Road*. Her most recent publications include, *I Give You the Springtime of my Blushing Heart* by Belvie Rooks and Dedan Gills (1945-2015) (Inner Pathway) and *The Power of Love: A Transformed Heart Changes the World* by Dr. Fran Grace.(Inner Pathway); *The Power of Love* was the Benjamin Franklin Book Awards 2020 Silver Winner, "Best Inspirational Books!" Belvie and Dedan are featured contributors along with H.H. 17th Karmapa, Huston Smith, Betty Eadie, David and Susan Hawkins, Mona Polacca and the International Council of the Thirteen Indigenous Grandmothers and others. She is also included as a featured contributor to the curriculum accompanying the emmy award-winning documentary, *The Journey of the Universe*

For over 25 years, **Sandra Bass** has facilitated social change both domestically and internationally through public policy, community engagement, scholarship, and education. She currently serves as Associate Dean of Students and Executive Director of the Public Service Center at UC Berkeley.

Upon receiving her doctorate in political science, Sandra was appointed as an assistant professor of Criminology and Political Science at the University of Maryland, College Park, where she integrated service learning into both her undergraduate and graduate courses. In 2002 Sandra joined the David and Lucile Packard Foundation, and in 2010 she was selected to lead the Foundation's girl's education, women's leadership, and reproductive health program in Sub-Saharan Africa, and later was appointed the executive director of Teach With Africa, an organization focused on cross cultural learning for K-12 teachers in the US and South Africa. Sandra has published numerous articles and essays in academic journals, blogs, and magazines and has co-edited three volumes including an upcoming special edition of the Michigan Journal of Service Learning on university students developing a sense of civic identity.

She currently serves on the regional board of Multiplying Good (formerly known as the Jefferson Awards Foundation), the UC Berkeley Chancellor's Community Partnership Fund, the Boards of the East Point Peace Academy and the Movement Strategy Center, and Co-Chairs the Vice Chancellor of Student Affairs Civic Engagement Advisory Board at UC Berkeley. She has served as a "Wise Head" reviewer for the MacArthur Foundation 100 and change competition, on the steering committee of the African Grantmakers Affinity Group, on the Advisory Board of the Haas Center for Public Service at Stanford, and is the former Board Chair of the Ella Baker Center for Human Rights in Oakland, among other appointments. She is also a nonviolence trainer and educator. Sandra holds a BA from San Jose State University, and an MA and PhD from UC Berkeley, all in political science.

This course is co-sponsored by the [Mario Savio Social Justice Program](#),